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Collective Bargaining in the Glass Bottle Industry

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THE subject of collective bargaining is a fundamental one and upon the disposition that is finally made of it will depend the peace and tranquility of government.

At the first industrial conference called by the President, which was composed of three groups representing employers, employees and the public, the public group presented the following resolution which was accepted by labor:

The right of wage earners to organize in trade and labor unions, to bargain collectively, to be represented by representatives of their own choosing in negotiations and adjustments with employers in respect to wages, hours of labor and relations and conditions of employment is recognized.

This must not be understood as limiting the right of any wage earner to refrain from joining any organization or to deal directly with his employer if he so chooses.

The employers group rejected this resolution and the conference dissolved.

At the second conference called by the President which was made up entirely of representatives of the public, the conference expressed itself in agreement with collective bargaining as follows:

The conference is in favor of the policy of collective bargaining. It sees in a frank acceptance of this principle the most helpful approach to industrial peace. It believes that the great body of the employers of the country accept this principle. The difference of opinion appears in regard to the method of representation. In the plan proposed by the conference for the adjustment of disputes, provision is made for the unrestricted selection of representatives by employees, and at the same time provision is also made to insure that the representatives of employees in fact represent the majority of the employees, in order that they may be able to bind

them in good faith. The conference believes that the difficulties can be overcome and the advantages of collective bargaining secured if employers and employees will honestly attempt to substitute for an unyielding, contentious attitude, a spirit of cooperation with reference to those aspects of the employment relation where their interests are not really opposed but mutual.

Now, the question naturally arises: Is the practice of collective bargaining in industry fair, equitable and just to the employer, the employee and the public? If it is not, then the group representing the employers of the country in the industrial conference were justified in their rejection of the resolution offered by the public group. If it is, then that group committed a great wrong as agreement by the conference would have made for the stabilizing of industry and a better understanding between capital and labor, the influence of which would have contributed toward allaying unrest in industry now and in the future.

Realizing that there are many people honestly in doubt as to the merits or demerits of collective bargaining in industry, it will be my purpose to attempt to contribute something that may be helpful in clarifying the subject, by giving some of the results of sixteen years of practical experience in meeting employers in wage conferences and by recalling some of the observations made during thirty-one years of membership in the Glass Bottle Blowers' Association, an organization that has been practicing collective bargaining for more than thirty-five years.

BEGINNING OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN GLASS BOTTLE INDUSTRY

Collective bargaining in the glass bottle industry began in a local way in the early seventies, and in the early eighties developed into a regional or district system. About 1885 a national system was evolved. Later on Canada was admitted, both manufacturers and workmen, which made the system international. Collective bargaining has worked out so well in the glass bottle industry that not since 1884 has there been a general strike in the trade, and the local disagreements and troubles have been minimized to the extent that they may be termed insignificant.

For the first fifteen years after collective bargaining was established in the industry there was but one conference held each year, at which the wage scale was settled and an agreement reached as to the hours of labor and the conditions of work. It was then agreed that two conferences should be held each year; one in May and one in August. The May conference is known as the preliminary conference which takes up any and all disputes that may have arisen in the different manufacturing plants throughout our country and Canada, upon which the employers and local committees could not reach an agreement. These are adjusted at this conference and all new bottles and bottles which are in dispute are classified. If it is not possible at the May or preliminary conference to reach an agreement on all these matters, they are referred to the final conference and in the interim conventions are held by the employers and by the workmen, thus giving opportunity for all connected with the industry to keep in close touch with the proceedings and condition of affairs. Then at the final conference all matters such as wages, hours of labor, con-

ditions of work, and the classification of wares are finally agreed upon, after which it becomes binding on both employer and employee. I may add that in all the years of collective bargaining between the Glass Bottle Manufacturers' Association and the Glass Bottle Blowers' Organization the contract has never been violated by either association; never has an arbitrator, mediator or conciliator been called upon to settle any of the differences that have arisen from time to time, some of which were very serious.

WHAT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING HAS ACCOMPLISHED

Before the workmen in the glass bottle industry were organized there was no regularity of employment and no stability in the industry. Employment was seasonal. Workmen were idle in the winter and employed in the hot summer months when their production was below normal on account of the extraordinary heat that the furnaces gave out. This condition prevailed because buyers of ware insisted on obtaining their goods at the particular time there was demand for it. Workmen and manufacturers in agreement, however, changed this by educating the buyer to anticipate his needs and the plants were then closed in the hot summer months of July and August and operated during the rest of the season—the time most advantageous for production. Instead of bottle manufacturing being continued as a seasonal trade, it soon was turned into a permanent, dependable trade to the benefit of the employer, the employee and the public.

As the years went on and the industry developed, many changes took place in the making of glass and the working methods that turned the molten metal into bottles. The continuous tank furnace came into the

industry in the early nineties and practically revolutionized it. Prior to that time, eight and nine hours out of the twenty-four was the maximum production period, but the tank furnace made it possible to operate continuously. However, this was not known at that particular time and only two shifts were operated, the day and the night shift of nine hours each. The night shift at first worked until twelve o'clock on Saturday nights. This was later done away with through conference agreement, and four o'clock on Saturday was substituted.

At the time of the introduction of the tank the workmen were naturally fearful that they would be employed only five or six months during the year on account of the extraordinary increase in production. However, the results proved the opposite. While the workmen were able to make a greater wage than they had previously made at the same price per gross, owing to better working facilities, the cheapening in the cost of production brought a demand for the ware that absorbed the increase which the introduction of the tank furnace made possible.

LABOR'S COMPETITION WITH NEW MACHINERY

In the late nineties came the semi-automatic machine for making bottles. This machine displaced the blower. It was in no way combated, retarded or restricted by the organization; in fact, the organization coöperated with the employers to make it a success as it has done with all machinery that has been introduced into the industry, realizing that in time it would prove helpful and greatly beneficial to the workmen themselves. Later on came the Owens Automatic Machine which required only semi-skilled labor—one man to operate a machine, known as the six-arm machine,

each of which at that time displaced eighteen skilled workmen. Later the number of arms on this machine increased to ten and then to fifteen. Hardly in the history of industry has such a revolutionary method of production been introduced on so short a notice with so much success. For a time it appeared to a great majority of the workmen in the trade and to most of the employers that about the only thing left for the hand process of manufacture was to do the best possible until such time as they were forced out of business entirely. However, the officers of the association, along with the conference committee on the manufacturers' side took a different view of the situation. Employers immediately demanded large reductions in wages which the workmen refused to concede, saying other means and methods should first be put into practical operation, and the enlarging of furnaces so that three shifts could be operated, giving continuous production for twenty-four hours, was advocated by the workmen. Employers at the time stated that this was impossible but later on found it to be practical and highly successful.

To have reduced wages immediately would have demoralized the industry and left it an easy victim to the revolutionary process of manufacturing which had been introduced. However, in 1909 the workmen took a twenty per cent reduction in wages and in 1912 another twenty per cent, making the reduction from the list price about thirty-six per cent. This gave opportunity to the employers who were unable to secure the Owens Automatic Machine as licensees to develop machinery of their own or purchase such machinery as other inventors had placed upon the market. This coöperation on the part of the workmen with the employers resulted in stabilizing the industry and al-

lowing those manufacturers who would have been forced out of business at great loss to continue and make some profit. I may add, with the exception of that class of ware which has been absorbed almost entirely by automatic and semi-automatic machinery, that our list price has not only been restored, but is higher now than ever in its history although the product is cheaper.

Stabilization of the Glass Bottle Industry

Members of the Glass Bottle Blowers' Association who now work on the semi-automatic machines and make bottles for thirty-six cents a gross which formerly paid the blower one dollar and thirty-two cents a gross, make wages in excess of what the hand blower ever made. I regret exceedingly, however, that, with the exception of the American Bottle Company known as a subsidiary of the Owens Bottle Company, a fifty million dollar corporation, no automatic machine plants are in agreement with the Glass Bottle Blowers' Association; although we had the explicit promise of some that if the association would allow development through the experimental stage without insisting upon joint collective bargaining that as soon as quality and quantity in production could be obtained from the machine, negotiations would be made. This promise, however, has been broken. The American Bottle Company, a company which did keep its promise and with whom we are in agreement placed first Poles, Hungarians, Italians and Slavs to operate the automatic machine. The wages paid were \$2.17 per day for a day of twelve hours. When negotiations were opened with the Glass Bottle Blowers' Association the twelve-hour day was reduced to eight, the same wage remaining as for the twelve-hour day. Finally, an agreement was entered into for two years during which

time these hours and wage rate prevailed. At the end of two years another agreement was entered into when our members received a substantial increase in wages. I may add that most of the foreigners had been displaced by the practical American workmen, members of the association. After the second agreement was entered into the war broke out and previous to its expiration common labor everywhere, and even in and around The American Bottle Company's plants at Streator, Illinois and Newark, Ohio, was receiving higher wages than our semi-skilled machine operators and semi-skilled sorters. Regardless of that fact, however, the contract was kept inviolate by the association.

Last September the association negotiated a new agreement with The American Bottle Company and I am sure on account of the stability and reliability of the association a greater increase in wages was received than would otherwise have been agreed upon, so that today the minimum wage on all Owens automatic machines operated by the American Bottle Company is \$4.48 for a day of eight hours. Not only is this company in agreement with the association for their semi-skilled workmen but at the last conference in September they also requested that we bring all of their workmen under the jurisdiction of the association, which was done and a wage agreed upon and the eight-hour day established for all.

This stabilizing of the industry and meeting invention as it came has resulted in great good to all who are in any way interested in the industry, and while the workmen have suffered considerably by being displaced, the association is now on the up-grade and the time is not far distant when a decent living wage will be made in all employment in and around glass bottle plants. In connection with this I may

say that inventions and evolutionary processes have so cheapened the cost of production that there is a market for the glass bottle product today which keeps the factories almost in continuous operation throughout the year and also gives opportunity to the consuming public to purchase and use receptacles that are sanitary and make for the preservation of life and health. These are but a few of the things which have been accomplished through collective bargaining.

IS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN INDUSTRY NECESSARY?

Now, we come to the next question: Is collective bargaining in industry necessary? As a partial answer I refer all who may be in doubt as to the necessity, to the encyclical of Pope Leo the XIII, issued in 1891 on the conditions of the working classes, and the report of the committee representing the federal council of the Churches of Christ on the strike at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1910 and in further answer to two or three illustrations of the difference between the practices of autocracy and democracy in industry.

Let us call to mind a morning in January, 1916, when the press all over the country carried in large headlines the story of a strike and riot at a steel mill in an Ohio town, stating also that the torch had been applied causing hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage to property. In company with the state mediator and a representative of the attorney-general's office of the state, I was privileged to make investigation into what caused the outbreak. It was found that the strikers were composed mostly of foreigners of several different nationalities which for years had been exploited inside and outside of the mill; that there was no organization among them; that they were compelled to work

twelve hours a day, seven days a week. In several instances, as high as four beds were found in one room occupied by two sets of men, the day and night shifts. Out of a population of ten thousand, there were 451 voters and 1,100 children in the schools, nine of which were in the High School; twenty in the eighth grade; ten in the seventh; thirty in the sixth; fifty-three in the fifth; 152 in the fourth; and 826 in the first, second and third grades. It was also found that the company had objected to night school for the adults. This tells the story of what caused the rioting when the men struck: it was because of no liberty of expression and action relative to the inhuman conditions imposed upon them.

Another striking example of the same sort of failure occurred with the attempt by the French under DeLesseps to build a canal across the Isthmus of Panama. It failed because the human element was not sufficiently considered in the planning of the project.

Later, our own country took up this gigantic problem of engineering and brought it to successful completion by a combination of civil and human engineering.

Colonel Gorgas, probably the greatest living expert on sanitation in the world today, immediately set to work to make the canal zone habitable for human beings without undue risk of life or health and in this he was eminently successful. Instead of men dying by the thousands, there was instead a healthy lot of well paid, contented men on the completion of this project. However, all did not go smoothly from the beginning, owing to the absence of democracy as between the engineer and the wage earners, which to an extent nullified the great work of Colonel Gorgas in that the best results could not be obtained even though health conditions were good. After the

resignation of Mr. Theodore Shonts and the appointment of Colonel Goethals as chief engineer, matters in the canal zone assumed a different aspect. New life was injected, bickerings, dissatisfaction and dissension were immediately reduced to a minimum, with the result that the dirt began to fly and the work performed was the wonder of the world, and why? Colonel Goethals introduced democracy into the project. I am told by men who worked on the canal that every Sunday morning at ten o'clock those who had any grievance could place it before Colonel Goethals, whether committees of the highest skilled wage earners, or the humblest laborer on the work, white or black, all were assured justice would be accorded them. The effect of such a program was marvelous. No under-engineer or foreman of any description could in any manner impose upon the men unjustly, without its coming to the knowledge of the chief-engineer who combined human engineering with his work. The result was the successful completion of one of the greatest engineering feats in the world's history, in less time than had been calculated and with satisfaction to the country and to all who had a part in doing it.

REASONS FOR ADOPTING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Some reasons why collective bargaining should be put into practice are that no man has a right to give his consent to work twelve hours a day, seven days a week unless for the purpose of saving life and property. To do otherwise is to violate the divine law which no worker has a right to consent to violate. In working this way the wage earner is deprived not only of looking after his spiritual welfare but also by working under such conditions he is wasting his body and thus shortening his life, for which he will be held

responsible. However, if forced to give his consent in order to keep body and soul together, or the bodies and souls of those who are dependent upon him, it must naturally follow that those who are responsible for forcing him into this condition must answer for it under the divine law.

There is, of course, common interest between capital and labor in the production of an article or commodity, but there is very little mutuality in the distribution of the wealth which it brings. This results in a difference, causing a conflict of opinion and when men honestly differ in opinion, if they will but get together and talk over their differences above board, they are certain to arrive at a basis for agreement; otherwise, there is misunderstanding, friction and resentment.

For further illustration, take the man who has planned an evening with his family, the man who has planned some social recreation, or who has made arrangements to look after some little business affair, or who is worried because of sickness in his family, who is told a few minutes before quitting time that he will be required to continue his labor for two or three hours longer or the man who has planned a day's outing with his family and who has given plenty of notice of his intentions, whose hopes are high, whose anticipations for the time rejuvenate a spirit of life that has been lying dormant, who is told on the last day or hour that he cannot get time off. His hopes, his anticipations are shattered and the outing a failure, all because some underforeman has exercised his petty power and authority for the purpose of being kowtowed to, or on account of the fear from higher up that profits might be disturbed by a hair's breadth. For such reasons as these the man is subjected to conditions which he must accept in silence and without protest,

thus placing him in a position not unlike the ox in that he must be driven to give service.

If more thought and study were given to the psychology of the human effort in industry, the gulf that now separates capital and labor would not be nearly so wide as it is. Workmen can be led and they can be driven but those who are led will produce much more than those who are driven. Among those who are led there is much contentment in the performance of their labor; among those who are driven, having no voice regarding their wages, hours and working conditions, there is much discontent. Although it may not appear on the surface, those workmen are resolving in their own minds, as did Abraham Lincoln when at New Orleans he saw human beings auctioned off from the block to the highest bidder, that if ever the opportunity offered he would hit that system and hit it hard.

In connection with this we may as well look at the facts as they stare us in the face. The wage earner of today and of the future will accept nothing less than democracy in industry. We might make palaces out of the work shops, the mills and the mines and, in addition, promulgate and install systems of charity, welfare work and coöperation on a dividend sharing basis, yet it would not satisfy, because the human family in working out its own salvation, its own destiny, will neither submit to dictation nor be placed in a position of some form of dependency, prescribed and administered, without having full and free expression on the propositions submitted or advanced, with the right to accept or reject, backed with as much power through organization as is represented by wealth and great strength

of bought intellect on the other side.

Humanity cannot and must not be measured from the standpoint of profit. It must be measured by the soul and the God-given rights to protect and save that soul and whoever interferes with this measurement, through the making of profits or unchecked competition, not only deprives man of his natural rights but is also sowing the seed of state dissolution in that such unjust, unrighteous exercise of sharp manipulation, power and authority destroys patriotism and love of country. Herein lies the danger to private property and our present form of government. I fear no revolution by violence for the overturning of our government and the socialization of the methods of production and distribution. But with the awakening of the wage earner through education, which is rapidly developing, there is great danger of his using the ballot to change our present social order. Unless industrial democracy is conceded to the wage earners by capital there is not a question of a doubt but that the people will change their form of government so as to include both political and industrial democracy. This means a form of state slavery to all which is to be deplored. However, the ones who will suffer most from this change will be those who stood firm and refused to make concessions.

In summing up, it is evident that collective bargaining is not only necessary but that it is also inevitable and that it is the duty of all forward-looking citizens of this country to work for the establishment of those things under our political government and industrial life which have been proven sound and practical so that our government in its present form may be maintained and perpetuated.